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ABSTRACT

A study sought to determine the impact vocational agriculture programs have had on community leadership. A revision of the questionnaire used in the Western Regional Impact Study was used in 30 communities in Oklahoma with schools having vocational agriculture departments. Community leaders were nominated by vocational agriculture teachers in the communities, and additional leaders were identified by those leaders. The procedure produced a total of 726 community leaders, of whom 369 (51 percent) responded to the survey about whether they had participated in vocational agriculture/Future Farmers of America (FFA) and how that experience had affected them. The study found that vocational agriculture/FFA had an impact on the success of many community leaders. Almost half the leaders surveyed (all male) had participated in the program. The typical leaders were presently residing in the same community, had been enrolled in vocational agriculture and been a member of FFA for four years. The leaders who had participated in vocational agriculture felt that their leadership activities were effective in developing their leadership skills, contributed much to their success, and have been of value in their careers regardless of occupation. The study recommended that vocational agriculture educators should continue to publicize the benefits of vocational agriculture/FFA to people in all walks of life, particularly leadership development. (KC)

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IMPACT OF VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE/FFA ON COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership development has long been claimed as a goal and product of the vocational agriculture program. In fact, one of the six objectives of Vocational and Technical Education in Agriculture is "to develop the abilities needed to exercise and follow effective leadership in fulfilling occupational, social, and civic responsibilities" (Objectives ..., 1976). The Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization, an integral part of the vocational agriculture core of instruction, is used to provide leadership training and realistic leadership experiences for students involved in vocational agriculture.

The success of this leadership development effort in vocational agriculture should be reflected within the community leadership. Evidence of such an impact would include the number of former students recognized as providing leadership within their communities and their perception of past involvement in vocational agriculture. Is vocational agriculture/FFA actually training for leadership? The success of many former members who are now in positions of high leadership seem to indicate that it is. Surveys have found an impressive number of former members serving as local, state, and national leaders. These leaders with vocational agriculture/ FFA backgrounds include former President Jimmy Carter, senators, representatives, governors, astronauts, broadcasters, magazine editors, leaders in education, and, naturally, many important community and farm organization leaders. (Lesson in Leadership,1965; Carter, 1977; Wilson, 1983; Pritzker, 1982; Stagg, 1986)

Although other research studies (Carter and Townsend, 1983; Arrington, 1985; Iverson, 1980) have shown that the leadership trait is enhanced with vocational agriculture/FFA training, there has been very little research conducted to determine the number of people involved in community leadership who participated in and/or completed the vocational agriculture program.

This study was undertaken as part of a western regional vocational agriculture impact research project. Traditionally, vocational agriculture educators have used an employment follow-up to evaluate the effectiveness of their program. However, the employment follow-up does not adequately evaluate the impact of vocational agriculture programs on community leadership. Because of this fact, an impact study was needed to evaluate the effect that vocational agriculture programs have on leadership roles in a community.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact vocational agriculture programs have had on community leadership.

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In order to better comprehend and accomplish the purpose of this study, the following objectives were formulated:

1. To determine the status of community leaders with regard to age, sex, occupation, educational level, participation in community activities and other demographic data.
2. To determine what factors community leaders consider to have contributed the most to their success.
3. To determine the community leaders degree of participation in vocational agriculture.
4. To ascertain the community leaders perceptions regarding the leadership experiences obtained in vocational agriculture.
5. To compare the level of involvement in selected community activities of former vocational agriculture participants and nonparticipants.

PROCEDURES

The instrument used to collect the data was a revision of the instrument which evolved from the Western Regional Impact Study. The instrument was divided into two parts. After the instrument was formulated, changes suggested by the Agriculture Education staff of Oklahoma State University were made and a pilot test was conducted in the researcher's home community.

Prior research has shown that regardless of the method of identification used, the results will produce basically the same list of leaders (Preston, 1969; Hawley and Wirt, 1968). As a result of the review of literature, it was decided that a combination of leader identification methods would be used. The positional method was used to identify those leaders who were in positions of authority and these leaders were in turn asked to identify other persons whom they considered to be community leaders. This was done to include those opinion leaders who might operate "behind the scenes". The results of this approach were used to develop the list of community leaders included in the study.

Six communities with schools having vocational agriculture departments - five single teacher and one multi-teacher (approximately the state proportion of single vs. multi-teacher departments)- were randomly selected from each of the five vocational agriculture supervisory districts in Oklahoma. This resulted in a total of 30 communities being included in the study. Vocational agriculture instructors were used to provide the list of positional leaders. They were asked to select the most widely recognized leader in each of the nine identified areas- agriculture, business, communications, education, government, industry, professional, religion, and civic groups. These areas were selected, based on the review of literature, to obtain a representative cross-section of the community and prevent biasing the study with agriculture leaders. All 30 or 100% of the vocational agriculture teachers responded. Results of this survey produced the names and addresses of 255 community leaders. These leaders were sent a cover letter describing the project, a questionnaire, and a sheet asking for them to provide a list of not more than ten individuals whom they considered to be the community leaders. After a follow-up postcard and a second mailing, 132 responses were received for a 52% return. After tabulation of their responses, 471 additional community leaders were identified and included in the study. Questionnaires were sent and after a postcard follow-up, 237 of these individuals returned questionnaires for a 50% return rate. This overall procedure produced a total of 726 community

leaders of which 369 responded for an overall response rate of 51%. A random telephone follow-up of 10 percent of the non-respondents and a subsequent Chi Square statistical test revealed no significant differences from the previous respondents in demographic data, participation in community groups, or the percentage of vocational agriculture participants.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze specific demographic data. Values were calculated for the appropriate statistic. The perceptions obtained from the community leaders about the factors contributing to their leadership skills and their vocational agriculture/FFA leadership experiences were measured on a five point continuous scale. The scale was designed so that the perceptions could be rated on a scale of one to five; one signifying no influence and five indicating great influence. In order to compare the level of involvement in community activities of vocational agriculture participants and nonparticipants, all respondents were queried about their participation in community groups during the past two years. Eight groups were identified: (1) civic, luncheon, and service clubs, (2) chamber of commerce, (3) community affairs organization, (4) school organizations, (5) political organizations, (6) church groups, (7) agricultural groups, and (8) educational groups. Summated scales were constructed to measure the number of organizations and groups to which the community leaders belonged (scope) and their levels of participation (intensity). For each group, respondents were given, respectively, a score of one if they were a member, a score of two if they were a committee member, and a score of four if they were an officer. These values were then summed to produce a range of odd-numbered scores from 0 (no participation) to 7 (a member who served as a committee member and an officer). An overall community leadership score was then calculated by adding the individual group scores. This produced a possible scale of values ranging from 0 to 56. To compare the participants and the non-participants community involvement scores, a T-test with an alpha level of .05 was conducted.

After each of the eight scales were constructed, their reliability was tested by Cronbach's alpha (1951). This reliability procedure measured the internal consistency of scale items. These reliabilities ranged from .85 to .77.

RESULTS

Objective 1: Demographic Data

The background characteristics of the community leaders identified are reported in Table I.

Objective 2: Factors Contributing to Success of Community Leaders

All of the leaders were questioned about their perception of how a list of factors had contributed to their success as a community leader. They were asked to rate each factor on a five point continuous scale by checking none, little, some, much, or great. If they were not involved in a particular factor they were instructed to check none. This was done so as an "overall" rating among all community leaders of how much each of the factors had contributed could be determined. The ratings of each of these factors is presented in TABLE II. The most often mentioned "Other Youth Organizations"

Table I
BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY LEADERS
(n=369)

Age:		Occupational Status:	
mean-	46.5 years	Business-	28%
median-	44 years	Agriculture-	17%
mode-	38 years	Education-	14%
Sex:		Professional-	10%
male-	89%	Government-	10%
female-	11%	Retired-	8%
Ethnic Origin:		Religion-	4%
white-	98%	Communications-	3%
other-	2%	Other-	2%
Educational Level:		Agriculture Interests:	
<12 years-	2%	Yes-	43%
12 years-	19%	No-	57%
Some college-	19%		
B.S. or higher-	60%		

Table II
Respondents' Mean Ratings of Factors Contributing to their Success as Community Leaders

FACTORS (2)	MEAN RATINGS(1) VO-AG PARTICIPANTS (n =162)	NON-PARTICIPANTS (n = 209)	TOTAL (n=369)
Learned from other individuals	3.78	3.78	3.78
High School	3.71	3.36	3.51
College	3.54	3.16	3.33
Self-taught	3.27	3.29	3.28
Professional Organizations	3.03	3.13	3.08
Vocational Agriculture	3.98	1.36	2.51
Other Youth Organizations	2.18	2.04	2.10
4-H Club	2.58	1.68	2.08
Military	2.08	2.00	2.04
Other	1.60	1.52	1.55
Vocational-Technical School	1.72	1.32	1.50

(1) None = 1; Little = 2; Some = 3; Much = 4; Great = 5.
(2) Those not involved in a particular factor checked none.

were Athletics and Church Youth groups. The most often "Other" factors mentioned were Church and Job.

A focus on Vocational Agriculture as a contributing factor to community leader success revealed a mean rating of 3.98 with 63 (17%) leaders indicating that it had a great impact and 58 (16%) indicating that it had much impact. It was interesting to note that 42 (20%) of the leaders who were not themselves enrolled in Vo-Ag indicated that it had contributed either little, some, much or greatly to their success as a leader. Many of these leaders stated that serving as contest judges, award sponsors, advisory committee members and participating in other activities of the program had been of help to them.

Objective 3: Degree of Participation in Vocational Agriculture

One of the main objectives of this study was to determine the number of community leaders who had participated in Vocational Agriculture. One hundred sixty two (44%) of the community leaders responding indicated that they had been enrolled in Vocational Agriculture. Upon further scrutiny, it was found that none of the females had been involved. With the females excluded, 49% of the males were enrolled. Further data on the participation of the community leaders is presented in TABLE III.

Table III
Respondents' Degree of Participation in
Vocational Agriculture/FFA

Participation:		Activities	
Yes-	44%	Judging contests-	84%
No-	56%	Fairs and shows-	82%
Years of Enrollment in Vo-Ag:		Chapter banquet-	77%
4 years-	70%	Committee work-	59%
3 years-	12%	Parliamentary Proc.-	58%
2 years-	9%	State Convention-	54%
1 year-	8%	Community Service-	53%
FFA Membership:		Public Speaking-	49%
4 years-	67%	Proficiency Awards-	43%
3 years -	12%	Creed Speaking-	38%
2 years-	11%	National Convention-	19%
1 year-	7%	Leadership Camp-	12%
> 4 years-	3%	BOAC Projects-	7%
Highest Degree:		Food for America-	3%
Chapter Farmer-	47%	Soph. Motivat. Conf.-	3%
State Farmer-	29%	Washington Lead. Conf-	1%
Greenhand-	21%		
American Farmer-	3%		
Highest Office:			
Chapter Office-	71%		
State Office	4%		
No Office	25%		

Objective 4: Perceptions Regarding Leadership Experiences Obtained in Vocational Agriculture

The leaders were asked to respond on a five point continuous scale (ranging from none to great) to a series of 11 statements about the leadership experiences obtained in Vo-Ag/FFA. Results of their perceptions are presented in TABLE IV. Eight of the statements were rated in the "much" category range while the other three were rated in the "some" category.

Table IV
Ratings of Extent to which Vocational Agriculture/FFA Activities contributed to Participants Leadership Development
(n=162)

Leadership Training Experiences in Vo-Ag/FFA:	Mean(1)	S.D.
Taught you how to participate in and conduct meetings	3.93	1.02
Have been of value in your career	3.90	1.17
Helped you in developing leadership skills	3.74	1.05
Prepared you for assuming leadership roles	3.63	1.06
Help you in your present occupation	3.62	1.26
Gave you the opportunity to lead others	3.60	1.13
Helped you become a more effective community leader	3.58	1.04
Influenced you to participate in community activities	3.51	1.07
Influenced your decision to become a leader	3.44	1.17
Involved you in planning club activities	3.40	1.07
Helped you in obtaining a job	3.16	1.40

(1) None=1; Little=2; Some=3; Much=4; Great=5.

Objective 5: Comparison of Degree of Involvement in Community Activities of Vocational Agriculture/FFA Participants and Non-Participants

Overall, on the mean summated scale scores presented in TABLE V, vocational agriculture participants had a higher degree of involvement in

TABLE V
MEAN SCALE SCORES OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

ACTIVITY	VO-AG PARTICIPANTS (n=162)	NON-PARTICIPANTS (n=209)	t value	prob.	
Civic Activities	3.65	3.51	.43	.664	
Chamber of Commerce	2.05	2.62	1.94	.053	
Community Affairs Org.	2.77	2.13	2.12	.035	*
School Organizations	2.01	0.92	4.19	.0001	*
Church Group	3.90	3.10	2.55	.011	*
Political Organizations	1.35	1.12	0.95	.341	
Agricultural Groups	2.81	0.64	8.17	.0001	*
Educational Groups	2.10	0.74	5.53	.0001	*
TOTAL	20.70	14.80	5.85	.0001	*

* Indicates groups are significantly different at a=0.05

community activities than non-participants. Specifically, vocational agriculture participants were more involved in community affairs organizations, school organizations, church groups, agricultural groups, and educational groups. Also, their total community activities scores, based on each of the group scores put together, were significantly higher.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, vocational agriculture/FFA was found to have had an impact on the success of many community leaders. Almost half of the leaders surveyed were past participants in the program. The typical leaders who were enrolled in vocational agriculture were presently residing in the same community of enrollment, had been enrolled in all four years of the program and had been a member of the FFA for four years. During these years, they had received an advanced degree and had served as a chapter officer. More than likely, they had participated in judging contests, fairs and shows, chapter banquets, committee work, parliamentary procedure, state conventions, and community service activities.

Community leaders surveyed who had participated in vocational agriculture felt that their leadership activities were effective in developing their leadership skills, contributed much to their success, and have been of value in their careers regardless of occupation. Surprisingly, it was found that twenty percent of those who had not been enrolled in vocational agriculture indicated that, through adult involvement, it had contributed to their success. This is evidence of just one of the contributions that vocational agriculture programs make to their local communities

The vocational agriculture FFA leadership development program contributes notably to community groups and organizations. Past vocational agriculture participants not only serve as members in these community organizations but are more likely than non-participants to serve in a leadership capacity.

Does it work? Is vocational agriculture and FFA actually training leaders? To answer this question one has only to observe and review the records of former participants who are making good as leaders in their home communities. The answer is obvious- IT WORKS!!

RECOMMENDATIONS

Vocational agriculture educators should continue to publicize the fact that the Vocational Agriculture FFA program provides benefits to people in all walks of life and is of particular importance in the development of community leadership.

In addition, they should continue to stress and expand the leadership development portion of their programs. Significant attention should be given toward the motivation of students to participate in, and become involved with, leadership activities. Local community leaders should continue to be involved in vocational agriculture as resource persons, judges, advisory groups, etc., and encourage as much contact as possible between those leaders and current students due to the documentation that other individuals are valuable sources of leadership development.

Critics and evaluators of the vocational agriculture program should continue to look beyond occupational titles and consider additional benefits

such as leadership development. This methodology can, and in some cases should, serve as an alternative to the traditional student follow-up evaluation.

Due to the increased number of females enrolled in vocational agriculture, this study should be replicated when enough time has past that the influence of vocational agriculture on female community leaders can be measured. Further research should be conducted to follow-up on this effort and document the impact of vocational agriculture on the individuals, schools, and communities involved.

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